


T O P S E C R E T

25X1A

 3861/63

24 December 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Presidential Response to Query Concerning
U-2 Overflight Policy

1. This memorandum contains a recommendation for your consideration. Such recommendation is contained in paragraph 5.
2. There is always a possibility that in his press conference the President will be queried concerning his policy with regard to U-2 overflights of the Soviet Union. The probability of this issue being raised would be heightened by any incident which would again focus attention on the U-2, but even in the absence of such an incident it is considered highly desirable that the President be provided in advance with a response worded in such manner as to afford the least inhibition to future intelligence collection activities deemed essential to national security.
3. Because of its pertinence there is attached the verbatim exchange between President Kennedy and newsmen at his press conference of 25 January 1961. It should be noted that, contrary to popular assumption, President Kennedy did not make any pledge or give any assurance, at least publicly, that there would be no further overflights. He limited his response to a statement that he had ordered that the flights not be resumed. An order, obviously, is valid only until countermanded.
4. In light of the foregoing, it is proposed that if the President is queried on this matter he respond with the following statement (this may also help to set the record straight):

"As you are all aware, President Kennedy at his news conference on 25 January 1961, stated that he had ordered that such flights not be resumed. That order has never been countermanded and so far as I am concerned is still in effect."

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If the questioner should pursue the matter by asking under what conditions might the order be countermanded and such flights resumed, it is proposed that the President answer as follows:

"I think it would be highly inappropriate for me to speculate on any such purely hypothetical future situation."

5. Recommendation:

That the President be briefed on the possibility that the U-2 overflight policy issue may be raised at some future press conference and that he be prepared to respond with the statements proposed in paragraph 4 above.

(Signed)
E. B. Giller
for
ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
(Science and Technology)

Attachment - 1 25X1A
Verbatim Transcript [REDACTED]-3861/63A)

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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

(Note: The initial reference is to the two RB-47 officers whose release was announced at the opening of the press conference.)

Question: Mr. President, did the Russians ask any quid pro quo or did we make any concessions to them in exchange for the release of these fliers?

Answer: We did not.

Question: If they (sic) did not, how do you account for this remarkable turnabout in their relations with us?

Answer: We did not. The statement which I have made is a statement which the United States Government put forward on this matter, which I read to you earlier in regard to overflights. I would not attempt to make judgment as to why the Soviet Union chose to release them at this time.

I did say in my statement to Mr. Arrowsmith that this had removed a serious obstacle in the way of peaceful relations between the Soviet Union and the United States and I would judge that they desired to remove that serious obstacle.

Question: Does that mean, Sir, that they accepted a reassurance of no more overflights as an exchange?

Answer: It is a fact that I have ordered that the flights not be resumed, which is a continuation of the order given by President Eisenhower in May of last year.

The transcript also records, at another point in the conference, the following question and answer:

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Question: This RB-47 was claimed by the Russians as an overflight, although we took a different position. In the light of the announcement, what will be your general policy on overflights and on such things as the U-2 flights? Do you conceive of circumstances which might warrant resumption of such things as the U-2 flights?

Answer: The Soviet Government is fully aware of the United States Government's views with respect to the distinction between the question of the United States Air Force RB-47 and the incident which occurred over Soviet territory on May 1, 1960 involving an American U-2 type aircraft. Flights of American aircraft penetrating the airspace of the Soviet Union have been suspended since May, 1960. I have ordered that they not be resumed.